

Research Article

Gender and Conflict in the Context of Terrorism on the Somali Women in Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya since the 1990s

Onyango Georgine Anyango¹, Kizito Muchanga² and Jason Momanyi Nyakoe³

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Abstract: In conflict situations, women and children bear the brunt of suffering more than men. The women situation is exuberated because of their gender. Kenya has experienced many terror attacks in the recent times; a situation that is akin to conflict. The main objective of the study was to investigate the effect of terrorism on Somali women in Eastleigh Nairobi since the 1990s. To do this, the study was guided by the conflict and social construction theories as they applied from a feminist perspective. The social construction theory was used to explain the specificity of women's experiences and their differences from those of men, since under patriarchal societal conditions as is mostly the case, women have a differential access to the public sphere or field. Critical theory on the other hand was applied to establish whether the male and female gender shared the same experience with regard to the effects of terrorism. The research design encompassed qualitative approach. This was employed to establish and interrogate issues of concern in order to achieve its objectives. The study employed both primary and secondary research methods. Under the primary research data collection methods included interviewing, administering questionnaires, observing and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) where key focus was primarily on Somali women but not necessarily excluding men. The main finding of the study was that whenever acts of terrorism occurred women and girls of Somali origin in Eastleigh suffered more, and differently from their male counter parts as they were generally more vulnerable, and yet, in proximity with terrorism prone regions, and also because generally conflict-related tribulations for women were often invisible. It was clear from this study that the fate of the Somali woman was ultimately connected with that of the child. Therefore, if children are to be protected and nurtured, then women and mothers must be empowered to sustain and rebuild homes and communities as part of mitigation against consequences of terrorism that has been particularly rampant in Kenya since the 1990s.

Keywords: Gender and Conflict, Terrorism, Somali Women.

Introduction

The universal nature of terrorism is further illustrated by Nabil when he states that terrorism is not an American problem and that it is a universal problem and a challenge for the world (Nabil, 2006). The multiple dimensions of terrorism to some extent may explain the many perspectives and theories of terrorism in the world today. One such perspective traces the phenomenon to the socio-economic and political conditions in the world. Yet, another common perspective views terrorism in terms of group dynamics. This view holds terrorist activities as forms of reactions to nationalism, ethnicity, poverty, non-democracy, radicalization, and religion (Crenshaw, 1981). Incidences of terrorism have increased in the last two decades both globally and in Kenya. In fact there is a school of thought maintaining that global terrorism has had an impact on terrorism in Kenyan since some of the players or agents operating in Kenya are internationally connected (Otiso, 2009). Terrorism has become a great challenge to Kenyan security. It is true that previously Kenya experienced what others have referred to as a different type of terrorism during the struggle for independence

(Edgerton, 1989). A good example in this case has always been given in the case of the struggle for independence in Kenya when the Mau Mau movement resorted to terror activities against the colonial government to achieve their goals. Crenshaw supports this school of thought when she says that nationalism movements often turned to terrorism as a last resort among the extremist factions, (Crenshaw, 1981).

In sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya and Somali countries have probably had the most terror attacks compared to other countries. The presence of Kenyan military forces to restore order in Somali by fighting against Al-Shabaab militant group has seen Kenya bear more brunt of terror attacks. The increased attacks in Kenya could also be attributed to the seemingly close ties with Israel and western countries especially the USA. The vibrant coastal beach tourism industry that allegedly threatens local Islamic culture have also been cited to explain the attacks, and so is the perception that countries predominantly Christian present obstacles to Islamization (Otiso, 2009).

Gender and Conflicts

Birkhoff (2001) in "Gender, Conflict and Conflict Resolution," Says that gender affects and permeates conflict dynamics at the societal and individual levels. Birkhoff goes on to state that, at societal level patriarchy is characterized by discrimination and injustices reproduced in institutions and ideologies. For Birkhoff, assumptions about male superiority pervade our thought processes. Gender may surface in conflicts in the ways that parties interpret and give meaning to the conflict. In this article, while quoting from Terrell and Segall (1995), Birkhoff says that women feel vulnerable in day to day relations especially with men. Women sense of vulnerability would be particularly salient in conflict situation since there is a potential for aggression and violence. This work was of benefit in showing the relationship between gender and conflict in the light of how terrorism impacts on the Somali women which is the main concern of the study. In an article, "why study gender and conflict together," Dijkema (2001) analyses conflicts from a social point of view. The author examines the relationship between gender and conflict and why understanding this relationship is essential in understanding gender dynamics as well as conflict dynamics. Dijkema further states that gender considerations are critical to synthesize the analysis of the private and public sphere by focusing on individuals and communities caught up in the conflicts. Dijkema, in this article, outlines three concepts in understanding the relationship between gender and conflicts and declares that war is a gendered activity. The author says in this regard that the concept of war is based on male experiences often erroneously considered to be representative for all human beings. The same applies to the concept of armed conflict which according to this author is also gendered just like the practice of warfare. This author also observes that conflict takes place since culture assign different roles to men and women adults thereby impacting their lives differently.

About the experiences of women during conflict, Dijkema talks of the invisibility of women's suffering. The author clarifies in this regard that, in societies where power differences between men and women are large, men often operate in the political arena called the public sphere while women operate in what is called the private arena which is the home and family. The implication of this according to Dijkema, is that people generally feel a shared responsibility for what is public while what is private is beyond the control of the public and therefore, is many times considered to be the responsibility of the family. According to Dijkema therefore, "The gendered distinction in society between private and public sphere in periods of conflicts makes women's suffering invisible since it does not take place in the public domain. It is the same logic of the invisibility of women suffering during conflict

moments that informs the choice of Somali women in the context of terrorism conflict in this study. According to Dijkema, and a position equally held by this study, it is for this gendering of the public and private sphere that women often hide abusive practices such as sexual assault and rape. This is done out of shame and guilt feelings that often imply personal responsibility of the private sphere as opposed to political acts of the public sphere.

Kasongo (2016), in “Gender and conflict: the role of women in conflict,” is in tandem with Dijkema on the role of gender in conflicts. Kasongo quotes Rosaldo who cited Augsburger (1992) as exemplifying the contrast between men and women when he states that males have a public orientation while women are wired differently. Consequently, the way men and women act towards a particular social fact will differ depending on the differences in the process of their socialization and the way they are culturally equipped. Kasongo’s work in earnest, is in agreement with Dijkema as far as laying out the relationship between gender and conflicts is concerned. Kasongo, like Dijkema has looked at gender and conflict from a social construction theory perspective which is also the theoretical basis of this study with reference to the Somali women and terrorism in Kenya.

Abdi (2013), delivers the discourse on gender and conflict closer to home. In an article, “A gendered perspective on the impact of conflict in the horn of Africa states,” Abdi conceptualizes gender as relational and presenting a situation where women are accorded subordinate roles and exclusion in relation to men who occupy higher positions of prestige and power in most spheres. According to this author, the political instability in the horn of Africa region has exacerbated already entrenched gender inequalities in otherwise patriarchal societies. The subordination of women in the predominantly Christian and Muslim communities of the horn of Africa combined with protracted civil wars and regional conflicts, have had devastating impacts on women and their families. Abdi also reiterates that armed conflicts and political instability adversely affect women’s lives.

“Women and intractable conflicts beyond intractability,” by Nyawira, and Malek (2004) provides an overview on how women are affected by conflicts. To them, both men and women suffer negatively from violent conflicts and both participate as aggressors. However, women are more susceptible to harm and abuse in environments racked by violent conflicts. According to Nyawira and Malek even in the absence of war, women lives are often subject to neglect and exploitation making female lives to be valued less. The authors further state that women’s susceptibility to violence takes the forms of psychological and physical harm. Rlehn and Sirleafur (2002), conclude this section on gender and conflict with an observation that women and men experience conflict differently since women rarely have the same resources, political rights, authority or control over their caretaking responsibilities. This limits their mobility and ability to protect this mobility, hence making them victims of unbelievably horrific atrocities and injustices in conflict situations. Part of the main concern of this study was to establish the extent to which this was the case with reference to the Somali women in the context of terrorism conflict in Kenya.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey method of research that is widely used in the social sciences. The target population of this study included the Somali women above the age of 18 years in Eastleigh in Nairobi. This age demarcation was hinged on the Kenyan Constitution which considers 18th year as the majority boundary when one has acquired more of the societal responsibility. the research sample was chosen through deliberate sampling employing mainly snowballing method for the 252 female Somali respondents used in this study, and

purposive sampling techniques for the 10 key informants. The key informants constituted of 8 Somali elders and 2 human right activists. The primary data collection methods used in this study employed different techniques that included face to face interview, administering of questionnaire and the use of telephone interview in cases where the informants could not be accessed personally. Interviews permitted the researcher to make the study more personal (Mugenda, 2003). Prior to individual interviews, the prospective participants were given a description of the study and its methods, nature of objectives and a consent form describing the procedures to ensure confidentiality.

Findings

Gender Dimension to Consequences of Terrorism among the Somali Ethnicity in Eastleigh-Nairobi

In a research item for this section, the respondents were asked to give their views on whether men and women in the Somali community had suffered from consequences of terrorism in equal ways in Kenya since 1990s. Table 1 represents the responses by the respondents for this item.

Table 1. Male and Female Somali on Suffering Consequences of Terrorism

Age Bracket	Suffering Equally	Not Suffering Equally	Total
18-30	112	36	148
31-50	93	11	104
51 and above	-	-	-
Total	205	47	252
Source: Field data			

Among the most common reason advanced for equal suffering included the fact that during police swoops both women and men are targeted equally, and that when men disappear women are forced to step in as bread winners. A key informant also supported this position that, “when men go to fight in Somalia and die, their women are left to face life alone.

The 47 respondents constituting 19% who maintained that men and women did not suffer equally from the consequences of terrorism, were divided almost equally with those who felt that women suffered more and vice versa. All in all, what was apparent in the reasons given for the responses on the equality of suffering the terrorism consequences, was that even though majority of the respondents maintained that suffering was equal for both sexes the reasons advanced for the responses however tended to justify the fact that the said sufferings were not exactly the same for both sexes. This generally supported the position of this study that the consequences of terrorism were gendered.

The UN platform for Action (1995) generally described how girls and women are especially affected with conflict because of their unequal status in society and their sex. Among the specific effects experienced by women of all ages are displacement, loss of home and property, Loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, victimisation through acts of murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape and sexual abuse. It has also been argued that, if one intends to destroy a culture, women are tactical targets of special significance because of their important roles within the family structure (Seifert, 1993). Compounding these gender specific effects, are the lifelong social, economic and psychologically, traumatic consequences of armed conflict (UN, 1995).

It was a concern of this study in view of the foregoing discussion, to establish why a Somali woman was in particular, more vulnerable to the consequences of terrorism than her male counter-part. To this end a research item required those respondents who felt that women suffered more to give reasons appeared more vulnerable in this respect. More respondents than had previously, responded that women suffered more than men, responded to this research item. A total of 139 respondents constituting 55% gave reasons to explain women vulnerability. These reasons were categorized and are represented in Table 2 that follows.

Table 2. Reasons behind the vulnerability of the Somali woman to consequences of terrorism

Age Bracket	Domestic Chores	Physical Weakness	Cultural Roles	Any Other	Total
18-30	16	09	18	17	60
31-50	35	18	-	26	79
51 and above	-	-	-	-	-
Total	51	27	18	43	139

A total of 31% of the respondents that constituted the ‘any other category’ gave responses that included aspects such as illiteracy and language barrier as possible reasons for the vulnerability of the Somali women to consequences of terrorism. Meanwhile, a total of 37% of the respondents mainly mentioned reasons relating to the assigned cultural duty of women in the domestic sphere where they fended for husband and family. Another 19% mentioned reasons that took issue with the fact that women were physically weaker than men and hence vulnerable to consequences of violence. Another 13% of the responses seemed to take issue with culture and how it made some roles female and others as males and where the roles for women as females tied them down making them vulnerable to consequences of violence that includes terrorism. A combination of the three categories of domestic chores, cultural roles and physical weakness accounted for 69% of the 139 respondents that had responded to this item. This found reflection in the fact that in societies where men are culturally assigned the primary bread winning role as it seemed to be the case with the Somali ethnic community, women were particularly vulnerable to poverty and deprivation when partners are killed or detained as sometimes was the consequence of terrorism on the Somali community in Kenya since 1990s. In the last item to the respondents, they were asked to identify the nature of consequences specifically suffered by the Somali women as a result of terrorism in Kenya since 1990s. These responses were categorized into: Issues relating to the children and women matters; Issues relating to economic matters; Issues relating to torture and rape and Issues relating to health matters.

Table 3. Categories of tribulations of Somali women due to terrorism in Kenya since 1990s

Bracket	Men and Women	Matters	Rape	Matters	Total
18-30	112	33	113	17	275
31-50	78	52	53	27	210
51 and above	-	-	-	-	-
Total	190	85	166	44	485
Percentage (%)	75%	34%	66%	17%	192%

It was clear that issues to do with children in relation women as concerns consequences of terrorism, constituted the main form of suffering and concern for most of the women in this study. 75% of the responses on the item on specific forms of sufferings as a result of

terrorism in Kenya since the 1990s had responses in this category. A sample of responses cited here included children suffering, children becoming orphans, problem in bringing up the children, losing children to terrorism through radicalization, separation from families among others. One key informant informed the study of 'a lady whose child was sick until the child died when she had been confined to Kasarani Somali screening center and was not allowed to take the child with her.' It is no wonder that psychologists concerned with reducing the psychosocial impact of armed conflict upon children must include women in their classical work and action research since often this constitute a major concern of women during conflict. Interesting differential psychosocial effects of armed conflict upon girls and boys and the appropriate healing modalities for children within their cultural context is a critical. There is therefore always need to strengthen women resources so that they, in turn, can provide better psychosocial and psychological protection for the children during conflicts since this is often crucial. If children are to be protected and nurtured, there must be women and mothers to sustain and rebuild homes and communities.

Torture and rape as a consequence or forms of suffering for the Somali woman relating to terrorism in Kenya since the 1990s seemed to go together with police harassment according to this study. A total of 166 responses constituting 66% of the respondents had responses that fell in this category. More often, the cases of rape in the hands of the police were not reported due to stigma associated with sex particularly in the Somali ethnic community. It has been argued that during times of armed conflict, sexual abuse, including acts such as rape, forced oral sex, mutilation of sexual organs, forced pregnancy and prostitution, is used as an extension of battlefield (Wilbers, 1994). Machel has pointed out in a study that even though rape is not recognised as deliberate weapon of war to humiliate and weaken the morale of the perceived enemy, it is, nevertheless, employed to terrorize populations and to force the enemy to flee. Rape is a sexual expression of aggression and in general, is characteristic of extreme torture; when committed during war, rape can be regarded as the ultimate symbolic humiliation of the male enemy (Seifert, 1993).

Going by the large number of respondents that cited cases of rape and torture of the Somali women the assertion that sexual violence during conflict cannot be seen merely as an inevitable 'by-product of war and insecurity, but deserves specific attention as a strategy of war and as a form of insecurity in itself. The extent to which the police behavior with regard to raping of the Somali women as mentioned above, constituted a strategy of war against terror is an issue of interest that goes beyond the immediate scope of this study. The human right watch report corroborates the primary data in this study when it documented that police torture and abuses took place in homes, on streets and in police stations between November, 19 2012 and late January, 2013. Some took place in the context of security operation following grenade or bomb attack in Eastleigh, such as the IED attack on a minibus on November 18th, 2012 and the attack on December 8th, 2012 on the Hidaya Mosque.

The police who were sent as reinforcement to quell the acts of terrorism harassed the Somali women by calling them names such as prostitutes, terrorists and warning that they could rape them at any given time if they wanted to. Beatings, kicking, punching and slapping. The Somali women generally complained of beatings. A total of 85 respondents constituting 85% mentioned consequences of terrorism that mainly hinged on economic categories. Frequently mentioned in this respect, was the fact that property was often lost and businesses lost. This conformed to the widely posited fact that conflict alters women's economic role in the household and broader society. The effects of conflict on women's economic activity also differed by age and life status. This was evident in this study as 52 (50%) out of the 104 of

the respondents in the age category of 31-50 years most of whom were married cited economic concerns as consequences of terrorism, as opposed to 33 (22%) out of the 148 respondents between 18-30 years most of whom were yet to get married.

As we conclude this section it is worth noting that armed conflicts create disproportional negative health effects on girls and women. When women cannot carry out their normal responsibilities, cannot protect and feed their children, or are malnourished and starving due to conflicts they are less physically and psychologically available to their children increasing the risk of disease transmission, (Murray, 2002). This amounts to a situation where health impact of conflict is indirect. Otherwise, health related impact can also be direct in the form of battle-related deaths.

A recent secondary review concluded that men have a higher risk of death during conflict, whereas women and children constitute a majority of refugees and the displaced (Buvinic *et al.*, 2013). There is evidence that conflict affects maternal health as well. For example, in 2008, the eight countries with the highest mortality rates were either experiencing or emerging from conflict (Safeworld, Conciliation Resources, 2014). In addition, a sex differences analysis in trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder found that females are at a greater risk than men of experiencing these conditions after traumatic events (Tolin and Foa cited in Buvinic *et al.*, 2013). It is therefore not surprising that 44 respondents constituting 17% of the total respondents in this study thought that health issues were a major problem affecting women as a consequence of terrorism in Kenya since the 1990s.

Recommendations

It is clear at the end of the study, that the fate of the Somali woman is ultimately connected with that of the child. Therefore, if children are to be protected and nurtured, then women and mothers must be empowered to sustain and rebuild homes and communities. Women in general, and the Somali woman in particular, must be safeguarded from gender specific conflict- related violence, and whenever such violence occurred, they should be supported. Above all, an all- inclusive positive peace building efforts, must be promoted at all levels; local, regional, national and international.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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